

THE MANIFESTATION OF A STAR AS THE GOD *ARCTURUS*' PERSONIFICATION

*Qui gentis omnis mariaque et terras movet, / eius sum civis civitate caelitem.
/ ita sum ut videtis splendens stella candida, / signum quod semper tempore
exoritur suo / hic atque in caelo: nomen Arcturo est mihi.*¹

The first character that comes into view of the audience in Plautus' comedy *Rudens* as *persona prologans*² is the god and star Arcturus. According to Della Corte (1952: 120) the character Arcturus was confined only to the initial portion of the dramatic action, as in the Greek model by Diphilus. Questa (1982: 18) on the other hand traces in Philemon's fragment number 91, in which the god Ἄϊρ plays the prologue, a reference to the model of the θεὸς προλογίζων in Plautus' *Rudens*. At first the god clarifies his heavenly credentials, then he specifies his sidereal nature and both his terrestrial and celestial location, then finally declares his name.

Limiting ourselves only to Plautus' comedies, we can find several examples of a divinity, that plays the *prologus*, to cite here: in *Amphitruo* the god Mercury introduces the background to the story, in *Aulularia* the *Lar familiaris* plays the same role, as well as in *Cistellaria* the god *Auxilium* and the two allegorical figures *Luxuria* and *Inopia* in *Trinummus*.³ But Arcturus's manifestation is very unusual, indeed as Lloyd (1963: 150) says: "Plautus' description of Arcturus and his function is in many ways unique".

The god — or star — Arcturus appears to his audience as a magnificent vision: the costume worn by Arcturus is blinding. It is a white star *splendens stella candida*, but we can't state precisely how he was dressed in a manner corresponding to its description. According to Negri (2000: 280) the epithet δεινός at v. 745 of Aratus'

¹ Plaut. Rud. 1-5. "Compatriot am I, from the realms of the immortals, / of him who shakes all lands and seas. I am, as you / may see, a gleaming constellation bright; and ever in / due season I rise. Arcturus am I called, both here / and in heaven, and fair I shine at night among the gods". Translation by Chase C.K. (1919), *T. Macci Plauti Rudens*, Clinton, N. Y.

² Raffaelli R. (1984: 73-77); Boulic N. (2011: 139-155).

³ Raffaelli R. (1984: 74); Raffaelli R. (2009: 13-31); Raffaelli R. (2001: 241-250).

*Phaenomena*⁴ assigned to Arcturus, can have a double meaning: it can indeed indicate the brightness of the star or its terrible nature, as a celestial body which introduces storms.

Ussing (1972: 464) says on this matter: “we don't know Arcturus' mask and his costume; but in v. 3 is indicated the nature of the star.” The same adjective is described as follows by Beare (1950: 184): “In the *Rudens*, again, the prologue is spoken by the god Arcturus, who apparently wears a ‘bright star’.” The actor who played the star probably was wearing a white robe, *candida*,⁵ white as the *toga* worn by those aspiring to public office,⁶ as Tertullian says: *purpurati regum vocabantur a purpura, sicut apud nos a toga candida candidati*.⁷ The toga, which could be made of linen or wool,⁸ was made white by the Romans with the addition of clay as we read in Isidorus.⁹ Some commentators, moreover, believed that the actor who played the role of Arcturus wore a star, bright according to Sonnenschein (1891: 83), or silver according to Romain (1897: 110), on his forehead.¹⁰

Arcturus, or *Alpha Bootis*,¹¹ is in fact the brightest star in the northern hemisphere and the fourth star in the sky in order of magnitude. The star is a red

⁴ Arat. 744-747: καὶ μὲν τις καὶ νηὶ πολυκλύστου χειμῶνος / ἐφράσατ' ἢ δεινοῦ μεμνημένος / Ἀρκτούροιο / ἢ ἐ τῶν ἄλλων, οἳ τ' ὠκεανοῦ ἀρύονται / ἀστέρες ἀμφιλύκης, οἳ τε πρῶτης εἰς νυκτός.

⁵ As Arcturus, also the Mercury's star is defined by the same adjective, Isid. nat. 3, 3: *quantum (sc. diem) a stella Mercurii, quam quidam candidum circulum dicunt*.

⁶ Plin. nat. 7, 34, 34, 120: *iudicatus est Scipio Nasica a iurato senatu, idem in toga candida bis repulsa notatus a populo*; Pers. 5, 33: *candidus umbo*; Val. Max. 3, 5, 1: *Idem praeturae petitor candidam togam adeo turpitudinis maculis obsolefactam in campum detulit*; Isid. orig. 19, 24: *Toga candida eademque cretata in qua candidati, id est magistratum petentes, ambiebant, addita creta quo candidior insigniorque esset. C i c e r o in oratione quam habuit contra competitores 'In T o g a Candida' scripsit*.

⁷ Tert. *idol*. 2, 18.

⁸ Liv. 9, 40, 3: *tunicae auratis militibus versicolores, argentatis linteae candidae*; Mart. 9, 49, 5: *nitida (sc. toga) fulgebat splendida lana*.

⁹ Isid. *orig*. 19, 24, cf. note 10.

¹⁰ Cf. Benoist (1864: 84) .

¹¹ Le Boeuffe A. (1977 : 95); Detienne M. (1958: 15).

giant with a luminosity 113 times that of the Sun, and can be observed from all the regions of the earth.¹²

Starting from the definition that in *Erga* Hesiod attributed to the star *Arcturus* — παμφαίνων¹³ — we will analyse the question about the brightness of the star which has proven to be stubbornly difficult and controversial. Some say the word should be understood as ‘bright’ or ‘shining’: Riccius (1590: s.v. παμφαίνων) comments: “lucens seu apparens;” Mazon (1960: 107) translates “radieuse;” Hofinger (1977: 509) says, “il dit de métaux (Hom.), d’étoiles (Hom., Hes.) — resplendir, rayonner;” West (1988: 54) affirms “rises shining;” For Tandy and Neale (1996: 113) it is “beaming brilliantly;” finally for Most (2006: 133) it means ‘shining brightly.’

According to others the emphasis is rather on the concept of the duration of the brightness of the star that shines all night, thus making Arcturus a celestial body that does not pass below the horizon. So Hays (1918: 165) says: “Sixty days after the winter solstice Arcturus rises at sunset and shines all night long.” In fact the star, in the constellation Boötes, is close to the Zenith,¹⁴ or rather just a little more in the south and when it turns it would not be subject to the sunset, so it shines for a long time. According to Hyginus, the star Arcturus partially in the Arctic Circle, so that to the human eye, it seems neither to rise nor set.¹⁵

The opinions of ancient astronomers both Greek and Latin appear to be in agreement about the brightness of the star: from Homer, Aratus, Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, Eudoxus, Manilius, Gaius Julius Caesar Claudianus Germanicus, Erotianus to Eusebius. According to Homer the constellation of Boötes goes beyond

¹² Ridpath I. (2007: s.v. *Arcturus*).

¹³ Hes. Op. 565-567: δὴ ῥα τότε ἄστηρ / Ἄρκτουρος προλιπὼν ἱερὸν ῥόον Ὠκεανοῖο / πρῶτον παμφαίνων ἐπιτέλλεται ἀκροκνέφαιος.

¹⁴ Hippar. 1, 8, 16: Ἄρκτουρος ἀπὸ τοῦ βορείου πόλου ἀπέχει μοίρας νθ’.

¹⁵ Hyg. astr. 3, 3: *Arctophylax. Huius manum sinistram circulus arcticus includit ita ut neque occidere neque exoriri videatur.*

the horizon at a late time.¹⁶ Aratus says that Arcturus moves clearly among the other stars, ἐξ ἄλλων [...] ἀμφαδόν.¹⁷ About this Kidd in his commentary to *Phaenomena* (1997: 215) writes: “Here 1st-mag. star is being distinguished from the rest of the constellation, because it is far the brightest. The phrase ἐξ ἄλλων means essentially ἐκ πάντων.” and also Martin (1998: 197) has the same opinion. Also Eratosthenes talks about Arcturus as the brightest star in the constellation of Boötes.¹⁸

Hipparchus in the commentary on Aratus’ and Eudoxus’ *Phaenomena* explains that the star Arcturus lights up the constellation of Boötes more than the other stars which are not visible because of their smallness, ἐπεὶ μέγα σῆμα Βοώτης ἀθρόος ἀντέλλει βεβολημένος Ἀρκτούροιο.¹⁹

Cicero defines Arcturus *stella micans radiis*,²⁰ Manilius talks about *Arcturus nitens* which rises with the fifth part of Sagittarius,²¹ Gaius Julius Caesar Claudianus Germanicus outlines Arcturus’ aspect, *os clarum*,²² using exactly the same word which was used by Arcturus in his presentation in *Rudens* (v. 6: *noctu sum in caelo clarus atque inter deos*); finally according to Erotianus and Eusebius the star is λαμπρός.²³

With this in mind, it should also be added that a further problem is represented by another adjective used by Hesiod in reference to Arcturus, ἀκροκνέφαιος, which could mean “in the middle of the night” Concerning this problem Riccius says: “h.e.

¹⁶ Od. 5, 271-275: οὐδέ οἱ ὕπνος ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ἔπιπτεν / Πληιάδας τ’ ἐσορῶντι καὶ ὄψε δύνοντα Βοώτην / Ἀρκτον θ’, ἣν καὶ ἄμαξαν ἐπὶ κλισίῃσιν καλέουσιν, / ἥ τ’ αὐτοῦ στρέφεται καὶ τ’ Ὠρίωνα δοκεῖν / αἰεὶ δ’ ἄμμορός ἐστι λοετρῶν Ὠκεανοῖο.

¹⁷ Arat. 95: ἐξ ἄλλων Ἀρκτούρος ἐλίσσεται ἀμφαδὸν ἀστήρ.

¹⁸ Eratosth. Cat. 8: ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν γονάτων α’ λαμπρότατον, ὃ δὴ Ἀρκτούρος καλεῖται.

¹⁹ Hippar. 1, 4, 20: ἐπεὶ μέγα σῆμα Βοώτης ἀθρόος ἀντέλλει βεβολημένος Ἀρκτούροιο.

²⁰ Cic. nat. deo. 2, 110.

²¹ Manil. 5, 357-358: *Hunc subit Arcitenens, cuius pars quinta nitentem / Arcturum ostendit ponto.*

²² Germ. 625: (sc. bootes) *Quem claro veniens arcturus nuntiat ore.*

²³ Erot. 41, 18: ἀρκτούρος ὃν τινες ἀρκτοφύλακα προσαγορεύουσιν. οὔροι γὰρ οἱ φύλακες καλοῦνται. ἔστι δὲ οὗτος λαμπρὸς ἀστήρ ἐν τῇ ζώνῃ τοῦ βοώτου κείμενος; Eus. PE. 14, 25, 6: ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ἀρκτούρος, εἰ καὶ λαμπρὸς ἐστι.

in principio noctis seu vespertinus, sole occupante Arietem ἀκροκνέφας principium vel finem noctis significat. Sunt enim eius duo extrema. Arcturus est stella, quae sub zona Bootae, oritur chronice sole ingresso in Arietem sub principium veru.”²⁴ Goettling (1843: 223) declares: “ἀκροκνέφαιος — Haec vox comparanda erat cum Homérico νυκτός ἀμολγῶ.”

Another possible translation is “at the beginning of the night”, in this manner Mazon (1960: 107) translates “du milieu des ténèbres”; Hofinger (1977: 31): “Qui est (se manifeste) au commencement de la nuit ou «du milieu des ténèbres»,” and Sinclair (1966: 60) “‘at eventide’. This therefore is not the morning or heliacal rising, but the evening or acronychal rising of Arcturus. ἀκρόνυχος = ἀκροκνέφαιος.”

Colonna (1976: 103) translates: “at nightfall;” West (1988: 54) and Most (2006: 133) both explain: “just at dusk;” Tandy and Neale (1996: 113) render it with “at earliest twilight.” Stokley (1961: 330), after defining Arcturus as “a first magnitude Star” talks about Arcturus’ position in June: “its position, along with other stars of the evening, as it appears about 10 p.m., your own kind of standard time at the first of June.” In this way the scholar would seem to support Hesiod’s claim about the star’s manifestation at the beginning of the night.

This work has been built on the study of parts of text which can function as stage directions in Plautus’ *Rudens*. I tried to collect, classify and analyse the passages of the comedy which contain useful information for determining the nature of the actors’ clothing through indications given in the preserved playscript. As concerns Arcturus’ costume, we may finally conclude that, beyond the complicated discussion about the adjective *splendens*, Plautus arranged for his Arcturus a simple white dress, like a *toga*, with or without a star to put on the forehead.

²⁴ Riccius, cit., s.v. ἀκροκνέφαιος.

For the realization of this costume Plautus probably had to make an adaptation of the Greek costume, made according to the possibilities offered by the great theatre of Athens, so that the actor could play when he had a costume more modest and simple, well-suited to the financial resources available to the company of actors and for the occasion, at which the comedy was featured.

For the functionality of this modest costume, the actors and playwright would have to trust the intelligence and the engagement of the audience. In some cases the costume may entail substantial and reprehensible contradictions in the eyes of a philologist, but it was more than acceptable for the public, who came to the theater mainly to laugh.

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